PERCEIVED NEEDS AND SUPPORT OF BEGINNING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

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The problem. The study determined concerns that beginning elementary teachers, who have graduated from a small private liberal arts college, have experienced. It also identified the means of support those beginning teachers had available to them in their first year of teaching.

Procedures. A survey was distributed to thirty-nine beginning elementary teachers who graduated from the same institution. A Likert scale was used to determine low, moderate, or high levels of need in twenty areas that centered on communication skills, teaching behaviors, and expectations. Teachers provided additional information on the open-ended section of the survey. Two focus groups of six participants each were formed from the twenty-seven beginning teachers teaching in Iowa schools.

Findings. The needs of beginning teachers are most evident at the beginning of the school year and are consistent with the developmental stages of beginning teachers. Assistance from support systems affects the ease of transition of a beginning teacher into the profession. Needs for assistance identified in this study included classroom discipline, communication with parents, and special needs of students.

Conclusions. Beginning teachers receive varying means of support to meet their needs in the first year of teaching. Consistency is needed in programs offered across the state to ensure all beginning teachers receive the support needed. Support programs that include college and university teacher education personnel and educators from school systems will make it possible to meet the developmental needs of beginning teachers.

Recommendations. A longitudinal study should be conducted to examine experiences of beginning teachers to determine if they have the same problems and needs as the teachers in the study had. The study should be extended to include all K-12 beginning teachers from all Iowa colleges and universities. An additional case study following the experience of one beginning teacher would provide insights into the developmental stages of a beginning teacher. In addition, colleges and universities should study methods of combining resources with Iowa's public schools to provide strong support programs to meet the needs of beginning teachers.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Hussar, 1999) approximately 2.4 million newly hired teachers will be needed between 1998 and 2008 to replace teachers who retire or leave the profession. As teacher shortages loom in the future, colleges and universities are annually supplying a new crop of teachers. Beginning teachers entering their own classrooms for the first time are faced with new challenges and problems that any neophyte experiences when entering the job force. Although new teachers are licensed and eager to enter the teaching field, the realities of the actual experience have, in fact, caused beginning teachers to become disillusioned with teaching.

To retain quality beginning teachers in our schools, empirical and descriptive studies (Bullough, 1990; Covert, Williams, & Kennedy, 1991; Levy, 1987; Norton, 1997; Veenman, 1984) have focused on the experiences of beginning teachers in order to address their professional concerns (Boccia, 1991). Further discussion involving those studies will take place in Chapter 2 of this document. To ensure the survival of beginning teachers, educators charged with developing programs to assist the beginning teacher "have a responsibility to take a hard look at the beginning teacher literature and compare it to the

environment and experiences of beginning teachers in their schools" (Gordon, 1991, p. 7). By better understanding first year teachers' perceptions of their beginning teaching experiences, educators could be prepared to ease the transition to the classroom.

Findings from previous studies (Ganser et al., 1998; Huling-Austin, 1989; Kajs et al., 1999; Sullivan, 1999) indicate that assistance programs for the beginning teacher have contributed to teacher success. As a result, there is a growing awareness of the need for support programs for beginning teachers (Covert et al., 1991).

According to Veenman (1984), a systematic study in the forms of training and assistance for beginning teachers is needed to understand how much help, support, and training the teachers need. By first identifying problems that trouble beginning teachers, further investigation is recommended for collaborative research that would benefit both university faculty who help prepare teachers and the schools that will receive the teachers (Stroot et al., 1999).

As Boccia (1991) suggests, qualitative research is needed on beginning teachers from their entry into the profession and beyond. It will require such data in order for those who "prepare, hire, supervise and support new teachers [to]

really understand the nature of their experience and the most appropriate ways to ensure that it is productive and long-term" (p. 18).

Rationale

As more and more beginning teachers enter the field of education, it is becoming apparent that more attention must be given to their needs and ways to support them in their first year of teaching.

Beginning teachers' roles resemble internship roles in businesses. However, there is not a consistent method of indoctrinating new teachers to their new positions. According to Covert et al. (1991), a teacher induction program that considers the beginning teacher's concerns in its design will be more likely to provide the support that is needed.

The concerns of beginning teachers need to be identified in order to develop the appropriate means of support. Studies conducted regarding concerns beginning teachers face for the most part have indicated there has been little change in the past 70 years (Johnston & Ryan, 1980).

With the emergence of teacher induction programs and the interest colleges and universities have taken in following the progress of their teacher education graduates, it seems logical to study the concerns of beginning

teachers and link them to the design of these programs. In this way, common goals can be identified, pursued, and realized.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine concerns of beginning elementary teachers who have graduated from a small Midwest private liberal arts college. This study also sought to identify what means of support those beginning teachers had available to them in their first year of teaching.

Research Questions

This research focused around three central questions:

1. What challenges do first year teachers face?
2. What ways do first year teachers cope?
3. What are first year teachers' best means of support?

Significance of the Study

A study of beginning teachers' concerns and means of support is significant because a large population of teachers will retire in the next few years. In a conversation with John Goodlad (as cited in Tell,1999), "statistics indicate that in the next ten years, the United States will experience enormous teacher shortage" (p. 15). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, a division of the United States Department of Education (Hussar, 1999), there will

be a demand for more than 200,000 teachers a year for the next decade. The Des Moines Register (Carter, 2000) has reported that one-third of Iowa's teachers will retire by the year 2005. With impending retirements reaching a peak in the state of Iowa, the need for keeping quality teachers in the schools may become a reality for educators.

If methods are identified to determine concerns of beginning teachers, schools will be in a better position to support and retain beginning teachers. It may be mutually beneficial to design a program that establishes goals to meet the needs of both the beginning teacher and the school system. Program design may include the collaborative efforts of colleges and universities as they prepare students to make a seamless transition into the classroom.

Since teachers "will remain the heart of the education system" (Carter, 2000), it is essential to determine an effective way to eliminate many of the problems beginning teachers encounter. According to educators cited in the Des Moines Register, Iowans need to act now to ensure top teachers are in classrooms in 20 years and beyond.

Definition of Terms

Terms used throughout this study are defined as follow (Huling-Austin,1989):

Beginning teacher: A beginning teacher is a teacher who has not taught before, usually one who has just completed training to become a teacher.

Support teacher: A support teacher could be a mentor, pilot teacher, buddy teacher, helping teacher, coach, or advisor.

Induction: Induction is the transitional period in teacher education, between preservice preparation and continuing professional development, during which assistance may be provided and/or assessment may be applied to beginning teachers.

Case study: A case study is an exploration of a "bounded system" or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. Bound by time and place, the case being studied might include a program, an event, an activity, or individuals (Creswell, 1998).

Focus group: A focus group is a carefully planned discussion of approximately 6 to 10 similar persons. It is designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a non-threatening environment. The purpose of focus

groups is "to collect qualitative data from a focused discussion" (Krueger, 1994, p. 37).

The overall intent of this study was to determine the perceived needs of beginning teachers. The researcher wanted to discover if there was a connection between the needs of beginning teachers, the support systems available to them, and if new teachers found the beginning teaching experience to be more successful with support systems in place.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Problems of Beginning Teachers: Historical Perspective

The first year of teaching has become recognized as a unique and significant time in the professional and personal lives of teachers (Johnston & Ryan, 1980). In research reviewed by Johnston and Ryan (1980), literature from 1930 through 1980 documents the research on beginning teachers. Representative accounts of beginning teachers' experiences spanning 50 years found the following common features:

- surprises during the first year of teaching
- problems encountered in the first year of teaching
- satisfaction gained from first year teaching experiences

Documented research most frequently focused on problems beginning teachers encountered. Johnston and Ryan (1980) found that a study of these problems resulted in efforts to improve supervision support, to validate or evaluate teacher education or induction programs, to predict the performance of beginning teachers, and to link problems to personality traits or characteristics of beginning teachers.

Barr and Ruisill in 1930 and Johnson and Umstattd in 1932 (cited in Johnston & Ryan, 1980) recognized areas identified by beginning teachers that were problematic including discipline, motivation of students, and organization of work and teaching materials. The research from the 1940s continued with similar results as found in studies by McGill and Flesher (cited in Johnston & Ryan, 1980). In the 1950s the amount of survey research increased, but the results were not significantly different from the earlier studies. Most researchers from this decade asked beginning teachers to identify the problems they faced, to tell how often these problems occurred, how difficult they were, if the beginning teachers needed help with the problems, and whether they received that help. A 1951 study conducted by Wey (cited in Johnston & Ryan, 1980) found problems similar to those that existed twenty years earlier. This study found that student control and discipline, deficiencies in equipment, adjusting to the teaching assignment, adjusting to needs, interests, and abilities of students, and motivating students were the areas of highest concern to both student teachers and beginning teachers.

In 1963, Dropkin and Taylor (cited in Johnston & Ryan, 1980) distributed a questionnaire in which elementary teachers ranked the level of difficulty of the problems they experienced. The problems ordered from the highest level of

difficulty were: discipline, relations with parents, methods of teaching, evaluation, planning, materials and resources, and classroom routines.

As the 1970s emerged, researchers recognized that most of the previous research centered on the problems beginning teachers encountered. These investigations lacked depth of understanding to the events that surrounded the problems, nor did they explore the actual process of beginning to teach. In 1979, Howey and Bents (cited in Johnston & Ryan, 1980) began to bring together specific aspects of the beginning-to-teach experience. Johnston and Ryan (1980) concluded that further study was needed, specifically in the areas of intervention and induction programs.

Ryan's First Year Teacher Study in 1980 (Johnston & Ryan, 1980) attempted to bring a comprehensive description to the beginning teacher experience. In this study, teachers' perceptions were sought to create an understanding of an event's impact on the beginning teacher. The teachers themselves were given an opportunity to describe the context of a teaching setting and to give their perceptions and constructs of the situation described.

Veenman (1984) undertook one of the most comprehensive studies of perceived problems of beginning teachers. Data from international studies were compiled which surveyed beginning teachers in their first year of teaching. Using

a rank ordering system, Veenman identified the most commonly perceived problem areas of beginning teachers. The largest percentage of teachers indicated classroom discipline was their greatest problem area, while motivation of students, dealing with individual differences among students, assessing students' work, and relations with parents followed next in order. Levy (1987) reported similar results from a 1985 survey that indicated managing student behaviors, developing or obtaining appropriate instructional resources, and organizing instruction appropriate to different learner characteristics were areas receiving the highest percentage of responses in which the beginning teachers desired assistance.

Killeavy (1999) found the most common area of difficulty cited was classroom management. Supplementary analysis also indicated a lack of support and guidance for these beginning teachers. Although coursework completed at college was helpful in the classroom, Killeavy concluded that problems beginning teachers experienced were bi-polar in nature. While there were teachers who had few problems and needed little assistance, those who felt they had received little assistance didn't merely experience problems in one area, but tended to experience other problems, as well.

When analyzing critical issues for supporting beginning teachers, Ganser (Ganser et al.,1998) felt that Veenman's often-cited 1984 study, which identified perceived problems of beginning teachers, might be outdated. In a 1999 study of beginning teachers, Ganser (1999) found almost no correlation between Veenman's perceived problems of beginning teachers and those teachers surveyed in his study. The implication was that the findings of the earlier surveys held less relevance to planning support for beginning teachers today. Because of the singularity of Ganser's 1999 study, further research would be needed to support that finding.

No two studies have resulted in the same lists of problems or need. However, Gordon (1991) concluded that a comparison of studies has yielded similar items, although their order of priority has varied. Needs identified by beginning teachers in which they needed help were:

1. Managing the classroom
2. Acquiring information about the school system
3. Obtaining instructional resources and materials
4. Planning, organizing, and managing instruction and other professional responsibilities
5. Assessing students and evaluating student progress
6. Motivating students
7. Using effective teaching methods
8. Dealing with individual students' needs, interests, abilities, and problems

9. Communicating with colleagues, including administrators, supervisors, and other teachers
10. Communicating with parents
11. Adjusting to the teaching environment and role
12. Receiving emotional support (p. 5)

Developmental Stages of Beginning Teachers

While Veenman acknowledged his study did not consider individual teacher characteristics nor individual differences that may influence perceptions and performance, Fuller (1969) worked with preservice and inservice teachers nearly 20 years prior to Veenman's study. Her extensive research of the perceived problems of student teachers or beginning in-service teachers indicated speculation about teachers' concerns and problems as early as 1932. Using data from others' research from 1932 through 1967, Fuller discovered a recurring classification of stages of concern. In a later research paper, Fuller (1970) characterized three stages of concern that teachers undergo in the process of becoming a teacher: a pre-teaching stage, an early teaching stage, and a late teaching stage.

1. The pre-teaching stage begins when teachers are still undergoing teacher training. At this point they don't know exactly what to be concerned about regarding teaching. They are primarily concerned about themselves as persons, not teachers. The teaching related concerns expressed are usually

vague and deal with anticipation or apprehension. As far as specifics of teaching, this seems to be a period of non-concern.

2. The early teaching stage begins to move toward concerns the teacher has about him/herself as a teacher. Beginning teachers seem to be concerned about protecting themselves and their survival as a teacher. According to Hall, George, and Rutherford (1998), concerns at this stage are either covert: Where Do I Stand? or overt: How Adequate Am I? At this stage teachers try to determine the amount of support they have from supervising teachers and the principal as they find their professional role within the school, reflecting covert concerns. Overt concerns emerge as classroom control issues and the ability to manage classroom situations that surface. At this stage the concern is high about how well liked the beginning teachers are by the students.

3. The late teaching stage is typified by the teacher's concern for his/her pupils. Teachers have reached a point in the late concerns stage where they question if the students are learning what they are teaching and if they are learning what they need. The teachers begin to look at how to improve as a teacher. More experienced teachers will be found at this stage.

In the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (Hall et al.,1998), conclusions drawn from Fuller's assessments indicated that concerns occur in a natural sequence and do not reflect upon the quality of teacher education programs.

Berliner (1988) also identified stages of competent, proficient, or expert teachers. His stages were identified when beginning teacher programs of the 1980s began to identify goals to help new teachers advance through the stages of teacher development. Berliner (1988) further developed his concept of the stages of development in a later work that described five levels: (a) novice, (b) advanced beginner, (c) competent teacher, (d) proficient teacher, and (e) expert teacher. As programs evolved to assist teachers, specific areas were perceived as key issues for establishing beginning teacher programs (Furtwengler, 1995). Components of the programs included support for beginning teachers from mentors and support teams, training programs for staff development, and evaluations of beginning teachers. Furtwengler also found that the involvement of higher education faculty in the process fosters the collaboration needed to improve the beginning teacher experience.

In a study of preschool teachers, Katz (1999) suggested at least four developmental stages for teachers. She also pointed out that the length of time

spent in each stage is determined by the individual teacher's needs. The stages Katz suggested are:

1. STAGE I—Survival

This stage may last the entire first year of teaching. The main concern of the teacher is whether or not he will survive. Katz (1999) noted that "discrepancies between anticipated successes and classroom realities intensifies feeling of inadequacy and unpreparedness" (p. 1). The beginning teacher during this time needs support, understanding, encouragement, reassurance, comfort, and guidance, according to Katz.

2. STAGE II—Consolidation

During the second stage of teaching, the teacher is able to consolidate what was learned in the first stage. In the first stage the teacher establishes a base of information about the students in the class; in the second stage the teacher is able to identify individual students whose behavior warrants special attention. On-site assistance is helpful when a teacher is at this stage. Because more information about children is needed at this stage, the need to develop a broader range of resources is important. Exchanging information and ideas with experienced teachers helps the beginning teacher master this stage of development.

3. STAGE III—Renewal

The third stage of development may appear during the third or fourth year of teaching. Questions about new developments in the field start to emerge as the teacher realizes the need for providing value to the students' educational experience. At this point the teacher will benefit from conferences and workshops that take place away from the school setting in order to meet colleagues from other programs. The teacher is also widening the scope of professional readings and activities.

4. STAGE IV—Maturity

The maturity stage may be attained by some teachers in three years, by others in five or more years. When teachers reach this stage in their development, they are able to ask more abstract questions that reflect "a more meaningful search for insight, perspective and realism" (Katz, 1999, p. 2). They may also benefit from interactions with other educators at conferences and seminars. At this stage, teachers may consider working towards a graduate degree.

According to Nimmo (in Baptiste & Sheerer, 1997), "teacher developmental stages pertain to the stages through which teachers progressively gain professional knowledge and beliefs" (p. 265). Although developmental stages of teachers have been categorized by researchers in a variety of ways,

the survival stage seems to consistently emerge as a stage beginning teachers experience. During the survival stage Baptiste and Sheerer (1997) suggested that adults have specific needs and concerns and "have a burning desire for those needs and concerns to be met 'now'" (p. 265).

Need for Beginning Teacher Support

Myton (1984), in an executive summary of a study on needs of beginning teachers, concluded that common problems of beginning teachers are both instructional and non-instructional, and both professional and personal in nature. While his observations indicated that concerns are more pronounced during the initial weeks and months of teaching, the subjects of his study seemed to need support that was more situation-specific. In Myton's (1984) report, prominent emphasis was placed on the social needs of the beginning teacher. In a compilation of research by Dr. Betsy Clewett from the University of Oregon for Myton's (1984) report, beginning teachers seldom felt prepared to deal with the various "players and relationships" in their respective school settings. The isolation of the classroom teacher and teacher autonomy had an effect on the new teacher's success. Combined with the fear of appearing incompetent or lacking credibility, the beginning teacher was reluctant to seek assistance from more experienced teachers.

Survival of beginning teachers is not always based on ability or training in academic areas, but with their ability to cope with non-instructional concerns (Runyan, 1990). Like Myton (1984), Runyan also surmised that beginning teachers have different personality needs that lead to situation-specific support. He also stated that school climates influence the behavioral tendencies of beginning teachers. Both Myton (1984) and Runyan (1990) reasoned that beginning teachers need emotional support in that first year of teaching.

Symbolic Interactionism and the Beginning Teacher

Bullough, Knowles, and Crow (1992) referred specifically to the use of symbolic interactionism and metaphors in thinking as keys to portraying the role of the beginning teacher. According to Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism refers to a distinctive approach to the study of human life and conduct. When using symbolic interactionism in their study of beginning teachers, Bullough et al. (1992) looked at three premises from Blumer (1969). First, "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (p. 2). Second, meanings come from the interactions a person has with others. In the third, the person deals with and modifies the meaning based on the things encountered. According to Wallace and Wolf (1999), symbolic interactionism

focuses on the "self" and one's interaction between personal thoughts and emotions in relation to a social situation or behavior.

Bullough (1990) proposed looking at beginning teacher's self-conceptions. As one contemplates self-reflection as a means to analyze oneself, Bullough referred to Herbert Blumer's thoughts regarding internal conversations. Blumer (1969) maintained that beginning teachers must "make sense for oneself out of experience . . . and to find new meanings" (p. 340) as they find and test meaning of themselves in teaching situations. By doing this, they will analyze teaching metaphors to find their "professional identity" and will be closer to finding meaning and understanding for their teaching. Like Fuller (1970), who classified beginning teachers' stages of concern, Bullough(1990) believed the process of teacher development occurs over time. Bullough suggested the changes in a teacher's development occurred through a period of self-understanding that resulted from self-reflection.

Blumer (1969) maintained that humans interact in society on a symbolic level. As such, meanings are not derived merely from prior experiences but become a process of formative impressions. The process of symbolic interactionism does not consist of a stationary plateau, but is an ongoing process where persons interact with their social settings. Wallace and Wolf (1999)

believed that "the internal conversations one has with oneself are an essential part [of the process of analyzing one's personal behavior and reacting to its meaning by providing an appropriate action] because they are the means by which human beings take things into account and organize themselves for action" (p. 200).

According to Pultorak (1996), Bullough's (1990) reference to the self-reflection process can be tiered into three levels. The first level is technical rationality where self-reflections are simply retellings of events or personal experiences that are not necessarily problematic. In the second level, practical action, the teacher identifies a problem which may incorporate a theory behind an event and will probably include some personal bias towards that event. As the novice teacher grows in his ability to be a reflective teacher, the critical reflection level, the third and highest level of reflection, may be achieved. At this level, the teacher identifies a problematic issue and is able to be open-minded when choosing moral and ethical criteria to include in the responding action.

When looking at the social control of a beginning teacher, Dewey (1938) described individuals as parts of a community, not outside of it. Therefore, he maintained that the significance of what is seen, heard, and touched must be understood.

"The first year of teaching is a voyage of self-discovery, or 'education,'" stated Featherstone (1992, p. 7) as she examined the journey of several first year teachers. She found that some of the most powerful stories of beginning teachers were those that involve learning or verifying some truth about oneself. Featherstone identified three stages that fall into the emotional sphere beginning teachers undergo:

1. Self-knowledge evolves as new teachers learn about themselves to do something new and difficult.
2. Learning involves not just observing, but struggling with portions of yourself.
3. Learning involves emotional, as well as intellectual, work. (p. 9)

Featherstone (1992) referred to the work of Dewey as she suggested that experience teaches very little; we learn not merely from having an experience, but from our ability to reflect on it.

Symbolic interactionism also plays a part in the ability of the beginning teacher to articulate the reflections of experiences which in turn will influence behavior responses. Shibutani (cited in Abrell & Hanna, 1978) stated,

> Behavior is not regarded merely as a response to environmental stimuli, an expression of inner organic needs, not a manifestation of cultural patterns. The importance of sensory cues, organic drives, and culture is certainly recognized, but the direction taken by a person's conduct is seen as something that is constructed in the reciprocal give and take of interdependent men who are adjusting to one another. Furthermore, a

> man's personality...is regarded as developing and being reaffirmed from day to day in his interaction with his associates. (p. 440)

Abrell and Hanna (1978) pointed out that behaviors are the result of communication. The symbols created in spoken or written language become an important part of the communication process, both with those interacting with the communication and the environments of which they are a part. Symbolic interactionists "view the healthy individual as a developing and learning person capable of forming a self-image, interpreting situations, taking the role of others, and negotiating interpersonal transactions" (p. 440). The works of Pavlov's "second signaling system," Mead's "internalization of language," Piaget's "studies of concept formation", and W. I. Thomas' "definition of the situation" are seminal works that have formed symbolic interactionists' philosophy (cited in Abrell & Hanna, 1978).

As beginning teachers enter the profession, the symbolic interactionism theory provides a frame of reference for those providing mentoring opportunities for the new teachers. Abrell and Hanna (1978) believed the symbolic interaction concept made it possible for supervisors to improve relations with the teachers and work together more effectively, thus allowing for personal growth, professional development, and improvement of instruction.

Beginning Teacher Assistance Programs

Beginning teacher assistance programs have been established during beginning teachers' induction period. This is the transitional period in teacher education between preservice preparation and continuing professional development. The concept of beginning teacher assistance programs, then, becomes a part of the "larger continuum of learning to teach" (Huling-Austin,1989, pp. 2-3).

The purpose of those programs, according to Huling-Austin (cited in Gordon, 1991), is to

1. Improve teaching performance
2. Increase the retention of promising beginning teachers
3. Promote the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers
4. Transmit the culture of the system to beginning teachers
5. Satisfy mandated requirements related to induction and certification (p. 9)

As educators move toward providing support to beginning teachers, that support can be found through different domains. Among the groups providing beginning teacher assistance are principals, mentors, other teachers, teacher educators from colleges and universities, and state agencies. Bainer (in Ganser et al., 1998) suggested that mentoring is one of the type of support offered to beginning teachers. She found that a variety of personal and professional

support needs to be available to new teachers in the workplace. She also found that support can be found from a variety of levels and a variety of sources. This concept, the "cluster model," provides the beginning teacher the opportunity to develop many relationships rather than merely having one mentor.

Mentoring, whether it is informal or structured, is an important support to beginning teachers. Thomsen and Gustafson (cited in Kajs et al., 1999) believed an effective mentoring experience could provide first year teachers with increased satisfaction and competence in teaching, resulting in success and effectiveness of the beginning teacher. Huling-Austin and Murphy (1987) concluded that, "the assignment of a support teacher may well be the most powerful and cost-effective induction practice available to program developers. First-year teachers who were assigned designated support teachers consistently reported that those persons were who they relied upon most heavily for assistance" (p. 15).

Regardless of the type of mentoring program provided to beginning teachers, Runyan (in Ganser et al., 1998) felt that meeting the teacher's needs must be a developmental process. Each situation must be evaluated according to the teacher's personal and professional needs perceived by both the beginning teacher and the mentor. According to Runyan "each teacher is in a

state of becoming and each tends to move through defined stages from a survival mentality to making an impact on every child" (p. 27). When accommodating a needs-based environment, mentors offer a positive, non-threatening support system that reaches out to beginning teachers.

College and University Support of the Beginning Teacher

Although Bullough (1990) believed development of mentor programs was encouraging, he stressed the importance of actively involving college and university personnel. He maintained that there must be a way to link beginning teachers together in groups specifically for support and for the study of teaching in the profession. He suggested a cohort be organized in preservice education that could then be extended as a model into the professional community.

Dollase (1992) focused his study on teachers with strong liberal arts backgrounds from select colleges and universities. Dollase listened to the voices of beginning teachers and wondered how much of "learning to teach" is a self-socialization process and what part could be contributed to the collaborative effort on the part of the beginning teacher and colleagues or supervisors.

The role of college and university support staff is significant in the development of a new teacher. As Collay (1998) noted, formal teacher preparation and internships strongly influence new teacher practices.

Featherstone suggested that preservice faculty should be asking what they could be doing to prepare students to look inward. She felt the most promising opportunity could be offered by providing a five-year program. This would continue a beginning teacher's connection with the university through an internship year. During that internship year the new teachers would meet regularly in groups that included other teachers, both novice and experienced. During this course of dialogue, teachers would have an opportunity to engage in the art of reflective thinking, which Norton (1997) characterized as a trait of an effective teacher.

Teacher educators from colleges and universities can offer valuable assistance in establishing beginning teacher assistance programs. The most valuable assistance would come from college educators working with schools through all phases of the induction (Gordon, 1991). According to the Iowa State Legislature mandate to the State Education Department (1999), beginning teacher induction programs should "promote excellence in teaching, build a supportive environment within school districts, increase the retention of promising beginning teachers, and promote the personal and professional well-being of teachers" (p. 2). Induction programs that involve college personnel broaden the support team for beginning teachers. According to Bey and Holmes (1992),

attempts to close the gap between preservice and inservice teachers is being accomplished through induction programs that:

1. nurture the theories and practices introduced in preservice education,
2. foster the understanding that professional development is a continuing and reflective practice, and
3. organize partnerships with school districts served by the university. (pp. 114-115)

Under a Kansas Goals 2000 grant, a group of college professors developed an Early Career Professional Development Program (Runyan, White, Hazel, & Hedges, 1998). This group proposed a needs-based induction built upon a philosophy that recognized the beginning teacher as already possessing skills and needs. The program would then further:

1. develop, extend, and modify or refine these skills;
2. orient the beginning teacher to the school system; and
3. address and meet the perceived personal and professional needs of the teacher. (p. 3)

In addition, this program would provide continuous support to the beginning teacher for the first three years of teaching through a variety of support systems. Teachers would have an opportunity to grow according to their own needs and individual teaching concerns. After identifying specific needs from a Teacher Needs Assessment Questionnaire (Fuller & Bown, 1975), this group coordinated seminar training sessions which addressed those needs, established an

electronic mentoring system to link teachers with qualified experts, developed a quarterly newsletter, and tested a transmitter/receiver system to allow a mentor to orally communicate with a new teacher via a small ear plug.

Another successful program initiated by colleges includes electronic "communities" as described by Bodzin and Park (1999). When teachers do not have access to resources available in the classroom, access can be obtained by connecting to a network which would allow them to "break down the teacher isolation barriers" (p. 1). On-line World Wide Web discussion groups, electronic bulletin boards, and e-mail listservs give beginning teachers an opportunity to post questions and share thoughts. Lortie (1966) and Odell (1986) acknowledged that a teacher's first year in the classroom can be far from the graduating college and can be filled with stress and self-doubt. Ryan (Ryan et al., 1980) and Veenman (1984) characterized issues of isolation, classroom management, motivation, and individual student differences as contributing to this stress and self-doubt. Cohorts of beginning teachers described by Merseth (1991) engaged in a networking system. Their reports indicated a positive response to the moral support the network provided. Although Merseth's study reported more emotional than instructional support through the network, the

conclusion was drawn that beginners who lack emotional backing will have difficulty dealing with instructional issues.

Internship programs are gaining support from selected universities. Internship programs guide new teachers with the help of educators in the schools. These educators include a teacher mentor, a university representative, and a school principal (Sullivan, 1999). In Furtwengler's 1995 analysis of beginning teachers programs, seven states reported having collaborative teams of local school districts and higher education institutions. College faculty's responsibilities varied from providing observations of the beginning teachers to providing inservice education (Furtwengler, 1995).

In a variation of the internship program, Winona State University and the Rochester Public Schools have offered a Graduate Induction Program to beginning teachers in K-6 classrooms (Sherman, personal communication, January, 1999). The program is designed to assist inexperienced teachers with challenges unique to entering the educational field. Teachers are assigned to a classroom and given a clinical supervisor who coaches the teacher by providing consultations, demonstration teaching, instructional feedback, and emotional support. The Graduate Induction Program provides one year of teaching

experience, a stipend, and tuition waivers for the 32 graduate credits for the master's degree.

According to a recent study collaboratively conducted by the Ohio State University and the Columbus Public Schools (Stroot et al., 1999), research undertaken by university faculty who prepare teachers and schools who will receive entry-level teachers could result in productive data. By working together and addressing issues encountered by beginning teachers, a "seamless transition" could be developed between the college's teacher education program and entry into the school setting.

Iowa Programs in Support of Beginning Teachers

In Iowa, programs for beginning teachers have been emerging in schools across the state. The state legislature has expressed a desire that effective methods of mentoring be determined for beginning educators in the state. Although specific measures have not been mandated, several Iowa schools have effective induction programs in place. According to M. Brooks (personal communication, January 12, 2000), the West Des Moines Community School District has had a district-wide program since 1996. Mentors are assigned to teachers new to the district. As part of this program, one support meeting is held for new teachers each quarter. The meetings consist of an organized agenda

that might focus on specific topics such as building trust and problem solving. The new teachers are given an opportunity to share experiences. Mentors of these teachers are brought in to process the session's content. Rather than establishing uniform goals for beginning teachers, more specific roles and responsibilities are outlined for the mentors by the district coordinator. Individual needs of the beginning teachers are recognized as the mentor listens, supports, and helps locate resources during the first two years the new teacher is in the district.

Assessment of the West Des Moines Community School program has included input from both the mentors and the beginning teachers. According to Brooks, the assessments attempted to answer two basic questions:

1. Are we retaining our new teachers?
2. Are we continuing to grow as professionals?

Her response to the second question was an unqualified yes. As for retention of teachers, the district is just beginning to keep data from exit interviews. Although there are still concerns, Brooks does not feel the reasons teachers move from the district is due to a lack of mentoring support.

An innovative program is taking place in the Dubuque Community Schools with collaboration from Loras College, also in Dubuque, Iowa. According to G.

Ott (personal communication, January 5, 2000) from the New Iowa Schools Development Corporation, the program established in Dubuque is gaining recognition because of the Pathwise program it has incorporated. The Pathwise program is an induction program created by the Educational Testing Service. This program offers a "supportive, formative process designed to assist beginning teachers' growth as reflective practitioners" (Educational Testing Service, 1999).

Major strengths of the Pathwise Induction Program include:

- a common language for talking about and assessing teaching
- clear and concrete levels of performance for teachers to use in assessing themselves
- structured events through which beginning teachers can develop and hone their skills (Educational Testing Service, 1999)

This induction program has extended beyond working with beginning teachers to providing for the Dubuque teachers in continuing stages of their careers. Currently the program allows for common understandings to exist throughout the teaching experience in the system.

According to J. Allan (personal communication, January 19, 2000), Loras College in Dubuque has teamed with the Dubuque Schools in several roles. Loras has used the faculty of the Dubuque Schools in an advisory capacity. The college has also employed nationally board certified teacher practitioners as

adjuncts and experts in the field to teach methods courses in their areas of expertise. In return, the Loras faculty volunteer to consult in the schools and offer in-service programs.

A natural extension of this partnership resulted in two grants written to establish and implement the Pathwise induction program in the Dubuque Community Schools. The framework of the Pathwise program created a common language for beginning teachers and for progressing teachers within the system. According to N. Bradley, coordinator of the induction program in the Dubuque Schools, this common framework for putting together a professional growth plan has influenced evaluation of teacher performance (personal communication, January 19, 2000). Rather than using a cognitive coaching concept, the school system has incorporated the Pathwise rubric designed to evaluate performance outcomes for not only the beginning teachers, but also for the successful and ongoing teachers.

In turn, the Loras College teacher preparation program has adapted performance criteria that are appropriate for preservice teachers in their undergraduate program to establish a model for excellent teaching. Field experiences and student teaching evaluations are based on the same framework. In this way Loras faculty hope to "blur" the boundaries between the

preservice and induction experiences, thus resulting in a seamless transition (Allan, personal communication, January 19, 2000).

Summary

During the past 70 years, an abundance of research has summarized the beginning teachers' experiences in the first years of teaching. Studies ranging from the early 1930s to the present document problems beginning teachers have faced. Because of these findings, studies were prompted that considered individual teacher characteristics and differences that might have influenced teacher perceptions and performances.

Researchers (Baptiste & Sheerer, 1997; Berliner, 1986; Fuller, 1970; Katz, 1999) identified stages of concern and stages of teaching development. Consequently, beginning teacher assistance programs evolved. Components of the programs included support from mentors and support teams, training programs for staff development, and evaluations of beginning teachers.

Symbolic interactionism provided a theoretical base to study the interaction of beginning teachers in their school settings and also the internal conversations and reflections these teachers have with themselves. These studies directly benefited schools that began to establish beginning teacher support programs. Induction programs emphasized the use of mentoring, and

some of them looked at the role colleges and universities played in the support system. As a result, collaborative programs were developed by some colleges and school districts that provided for beginning teachers' needs.

Thorough research identified major areas of concern for beginning teachers. The ability of beginning teachers to reflect upon their teaching and recognize and deal with these concerns indicates a willing commitment to their profession. Offering support to beginning teachers seems to be a good investment for keeping capable teachers in our school systems (Covert et al., 1991).

This review of literature provided several areas to consider:

1. Teachers have specific needs in their beginning year of teaching.

2. More study may be needed to substantiate whether those needs are following the same patterns of need documented in prior research.

3. Beginning teachers experience stages of growth in their development as teachers.

4. Identified needs and stages of development may be helpful in providing program support to beginning teachers.

5. Colleges and universities can provide valuable resources and support to the beginning teacher.

With observations from the literature as a guide, research will provide the basis for clearer understanding of the needs of beginning teachers and support programs that best suit their needs.

Chapter 3

METHOD

This study has utilized a qualitative research approach to establish a clearer understanding and explanation of the needs of beginning teachers. As Merriam (1998) noted, a qualitative researcher is interested in the meaning people have constructed in regard to a given situation, how those persons are able to make sense of their world, and the experiences that have contributed to their meaning-making. Because of the nature of this study, a qualitative approach was used to understand the needs of beginning teachers from the beginning teachers' perspectives.

When choosing a qualitative design, the following considerations were taken into account. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined characteristics that guide qualitative research as a postpositivist approach to naturalistic inquiry. First, the research is conducted in a natural setting. Because of the nature of the research problem, communicating with study participants in the field to determine what respondents are thinking is a logical means to attempt to understand the meaning of experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

A second characteristic Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested was the selection of the researcher as the primary data-gathering instrument. In the

qualitative approach, the methods used for interaction between the researcher and the participant allow for an interpretive evaluation of the phenomenon described. Qualitative methods tend to be "more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40).

A further consideration was that of the use of descriptive data. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) described qualitative research as interpretive and naturalistic in its approach. As these authors have indicated, qualitative research involves the use and collection of a variety of empirical materials that include case study, interviews, and interactions, which were used in this study. By using a variety of methods, Denzin and Lincoln maintained that researchers were able to make those connections that enabled a better understanding of the subjects being studied. This triangulation of the data established a trustworthiness through its use of multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 1998). A rich, descriptive product is the result of a qualitative research whose focus is on process, meaning, and understanding (Merriam, 1998).

Guiding this design were characteristics reiterated by Creswell (1998) that included: "the multiple nature of reality, the close relationship of the researcher to the participants, the value-laden aspect of the inquiry, the personal approach

to writing the narrative, and the emerging inductive methodology of the process of research" (p. 73).

Because this study explored the phenomenon of beginning teachers in their first year of teaching, a case study was chosen as the means by which to carry out the research. Stake (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) has identified researchers' intrinsic and instrumental interests for studying cases. An instrumental case study, one that is examined to provide insight into an issue, was designed to look at the concerns of beginning teachers in depth. Although the study might have been considered an intrinsic study because of the researcher's intrinsic interest in the issue, the purpose was not to understand the phenomenon, but to provide insights into beginning teachers' perspectives.

Yin (1994) defined a case study in terms of the research process. "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Case studies focus on process. First, meaning is monitored and then explained in order to discover characteristics that shed light on an issue, in this case the needs of beginning teachers (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Sampling

In this case study, the focus was on beginning teachers. Selection of the teachers for this group was determined from the researcher's work with the teacher education program in a Midwest private liberal arts college. Stake (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) maintained important things could be learned by studying a small subpopulation of accessible cases from a larger population. By identifying a group that the most time could be spent with, the researcher was able to generalize about the needs of beginning teachers.

Thirty-nine elementary teacher education graduates from the same private liberal arts college were identified as known to be in their first year of teaching. This group consisted of 30 females and 9 males, 27 of whom were teaching in Iowa while 9 taught elsewhere. The teachers represented both rural and urban school districts.

An introductory letter was used to secure the consent of the participants. A signed consent form was returned to the researcher (Appendix A).

Data Collection

When collecting data in qualitative case studies, Merriam (1998) observed that any and all methods of data collection are often used. Techniques are often chosen based on how the study was framed and the sample chosen.

Patton (Merriam, 1998) stated the "multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective . . . " (p. 137). For this study, data were gathered through surveys (Appendix B), open-ended responses, focus group interviews (Appendix C), and informal interviews.

Surveys were sent to each of the 39 teachers. The surveys consisted of 20 items which asked the teachers to identify their level of need on a three-point Likert scale. The items identified areas in which they were to respond either to a low need, moderate need, or high need for assistance in each given area. Organization of the statements centered around three basic areas: communication skills, teaching behaviors, and expectations of a first year teacher. In addition, the teachers were invited to provide optional demographic information and given an opportunity to contribute additional comments in an open-ended forum. According to Yin (1994), the main purpose of the open-ended response is to document the connection between specific pieces of evidence and various pieces of evidence of the case study. Follow-up postcard reminders were sent to the participants to encourage a high response of return (Appendix D).

letters of explanation and personal postcard and/or email reminders (Appendix E).

Focus group questions were developed with the research questions in mind. Seven essential questions guided the interview.

1. Tell me about your first year of teaching.
2. Tell me about the beginning of your year.
3. Tell me the best thing about the year.
4. What was the most challenging thing?
5. Who and what helped you the most?
6. What things would you do differently?
7. What advice would you give to this year's [college] graduates?

The researcher served as moderator for the sessions, which were tape-recorded. The seven key questions were placed on separate chart paper and participant responses were recorded on those charts. Each of the questions was carefully worded in order that the researcher appear unknowing about the topic, which allowed the respondents to provide "fresh commentary" about it (Yin, 1994). Prompts and probes were used when follow-up was desired to go deeper into interviewee responses.

Incentives and lunch were provided for the participants. According to Krueger (1994), incentives are needed because participation in focus groups requires time and effort taken away from an already busy schedule.

Limitations

The participants were chosen from a private liberal arts college in Iowa. These teachers were chosen because they represented a population of cases (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). It was felt that the phenomenon of interest in the case--the perceived needs of beginning teachers--would be represented generally. Stake (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) felt optimistic that important things could be learned from almost any case.

The researcher had previously supervised some of the participants in their student teaching experiences. Every effort was made to remove bias from survey and interview questions. When dealing with the issue of bias, Yin (1994) suggested that the researcher treat the evidence fairly, produce compelling conclusions, and rule out alternative interpretations. By returning to the research questions, the review of literature, and new insights gained from the data, the researcher was able to shape the data collection.

The data for this study were collected mid-year of the beginning teachers' first year of teaching. The rationale for choosing this time was based on results

of a study conducted by Covert et al. (1991). It was thought that after six months, beginning teachers would have had adequate time to become accustomed to their teaching situations and to be able to respond to the topics in the surveys and group interviews.

Data Analysis

As previously noted, qualitative research is a process of making sense of the collected data. For this study, data from the surveys were compiled into graphs to visually represent the results. According to Merriam (1998), data from researcher-generated documents, including statistical data from surveys, can be used in the same manner as data from interviews or observations. The data can "furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, and advance new categories and hypotheses" (p. 126). The focus group interview tapes were transcribed, and notes from the interviews were assembled into an organized format.

Data from the focus groups were sorted into groups that had words or phrases in common. In looking for emerging themes and categories, patterns began to develop. Strauss and Corbin (1998) pointed out that categories are concepts, derived from data, that stand for phenomena. Coding was implemented in order to name the categories. Symbols were applied to phrases

and groups of words. As Miles and Huberman (1984) noted, codes and categories were derived from research questions, key concepts, and important themes.

As the researcher returned to the research questions, information was identified that fell under those categories. Each category in turn was able to reflect the purpose by providing answers to the research questions (Merriam, 1998).

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Beginning elementary teachers' perceptions were collected for this study through the use of surveys, open-ended questions, and focus group interviews.

The survey was distributed to thirty-nine teacher education graduates from a Midwest private liberal arts college known to be in their first year of teaching. A 69% return was received from the surveys distributed. An effort was made to determine areas in which the beginning teachers felt they had the greatest need of assistance during their first year of teaching. The survey consisted of 20 items that dealt with areas of communication skills, teaching behaviors, and expectations.

Teachers were able to respond to each item by indicating a low need, moderate need, or high need for assistance in each area. A low need response indicated the teacher felt comfortable in that area and needed no further assistance. A moderate need indicated the teacher felt adequately able to meet the need in that particular area, but would be interested in receiving assistance to more capably meet the need. Teachers indicating a high need felt they could have used some assistance, either in preparation, materials, or support and would be interested in receiving assistance to meet that need.

The teachers were given an opportunity to provide additional comments following each survey item. The instructions for the open-ended section invited the respondents to indicate further comments they wished to provide.

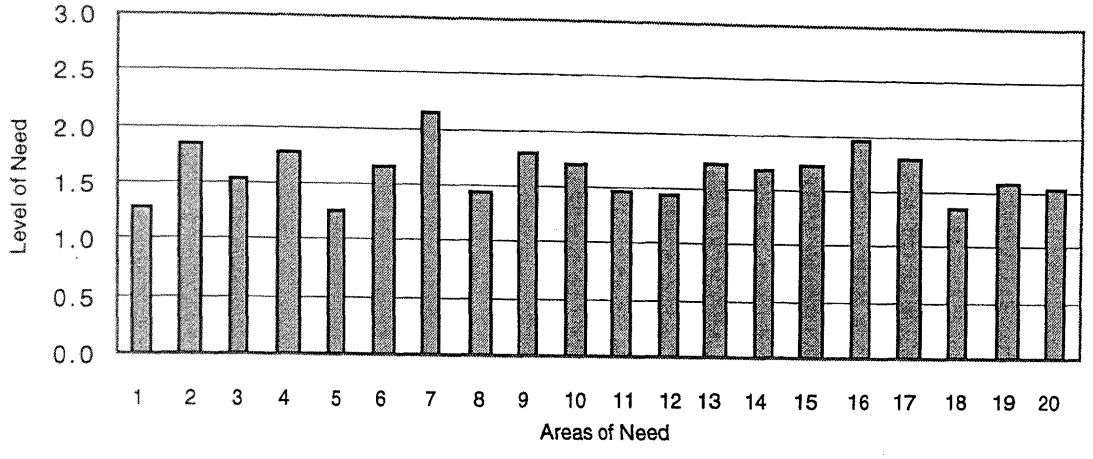

Figure 1. Beginning teachers' levels of need.

1. Written/spoken communication
2. Communication with parents
3. Communication with teaching colleagues
4. Communication with administrators
5. Personal motivation
6. Motivation of students
7. Classroom discipline
8. Lesson design
9. Long range planning
10. Time management
11. Knowledge of subject matter
12. Effective teaching methods
13. Instructional resources
14. Evaluation of students
15. Identification of levels of learning
16. Special needs of students
17. Expectations of district
18. Expectations of principal
19. Expectations of other teachers
20. Expectations of parents

1=low need
2=moderate need
3=high need

Figure 1 indicated how the teachers rated the areas surveyed. Although collectively the group did not display any one area of high need, the area indicating the highest percentage of need was that of classroom discipline with

2.1%, a moderate level of need. The next highest rated areas were special needs of students at 2% and communication with parents at 1.9%, both indicating moderate levels of need. This visual representation provided a general portrayal of how the beginning teachers rated the survey items; however, the most telling information was that which the teachers provided themselves in the personal comments following each of the items.

Communication Skills

Communication with parents was a slightly higher area of need than the other communication items. Some responses indicated beginning teachers' concerns as:

> This was one of the scariest things for me at the beginning of the school year! I never did much during student teaching so I really didn't know what to do or say!
>
> I have good ideas on how to communicate with parents, but I don't feel extremely comfortable talking with them. I'm sure it will get better with more experience.
>
> All parents are different so we need as many different ways [as] possible to reach them.
>
> It would be great to have more examples of actual notes that would go home at the beginning of the year, when you need more parent support, etc. We receive a lot of teaching on why it is important to communicate with families, but little experience with how.
>
> Communication with teaching colleagues proved to be positive, with one

respondent suggesting that perhaps role playing different approaches with colleagues as preservice teachers would provide methods for successful co-teaching. Other responses indicated:

> I was overwhelmed at first, but able to adjust and "fit in."
>
> Colleagues are a valuable resource.
>
> My colleagues are very approachable. They made it clear to me from the first day that they are willing to help me whenever I need it. We plan together weekly.
>
> I feel I have strong relationships with my teaching colleagues. I think I work well with others and am a team player.

Communication with administrators supplied responses that indicated the teachers were uncertain about this relationship, yet some responses that demonstrated positive interactions with their administrators.

> I'm still not always sure how and what I should communicate with administrators.
>
> They don't do a good job of communicating with me.
>
> I think a lot of it is learn as you go. You need to learn the personality of the administrators and their beliefs so you know how to approach them.
>
> Things are going great. The administration is wonderful in my school district. They are very helpful and personable.

One teacher offered this advice:

> Take the training beyond the communication needed to get a job: How do you relate [to an administrator] once you have it? What can you expect (especially in [student] discipline) from your principal?

Teaching Behaviors

Personal motivation pointed to the ability of the teacher to look forward to coming to school each day. As evidenced by the graph, this was the lowest area of need on the survey. Comments reflected that observation.

> When I feel prepared and I know my lessons are on track, I feel better about coming to school. I had to learn how to build a support system at school.

> During my student teaching experience and my first year, there hasn't been a day when I didn't look forward to going to school.

One teacher noted that personal motivation is highly dependent on your attitude and really can't be taught.

Motivation of students seemed to be a little more difficult. One response summed up the thoughts of many:

> In the first half of my first year of teaching I've tried many techniques of motivating the students. Some are successful while others are not as effective.

For the most part, comments from the teachers suggested they would like strategies to help them with classroom discipline. One teacher also expressed a need for discipline strategies for special needs children in a mainstreamed classroom. As one beginning teacher noted:

> I needed a good starting place at the beginning of the year. I have good ideas now, but they are difficult to incorporate in the middle of the year.

Organization of daily lesson design and long term planning found the first year teachers feeling that they were confident in this area. Comments generally spoke to the fact that they felt well prepared in their preservice training. Although, as one teacher noted, "I believe this will improve with experience. I've already noticed that I could have done some things different. Things could have flowed smoother." Another teacher, however, commented, "This first year I'm surviving day by day."

Organization of time and work on a daily basis garnered interesting responses that indicated some frustrations and challenges:

> When everything needs to get done (especially your first year), it is so hard to balance and prioritize!
>
> There is a lot to do the first year.
>
> I wasn't prepared for all of the written observations needed, especially when the time for evaluations came around.
>
> This is so dependent on your district's emphasis and is the problem of every teacher, novice or veteran!

The beginning teachers felt fairly comfortable with their knowledge of subject matter. As one teacher noted, "We have a lot of knowledge of children. That's our subject matter." Some of the new teachers found the need for

additional coursework in the positions for which they were hired, specifically in reading classrooms.

Responses indicated the beginning teachers' preservice experiences prepared them well for knowledge and use of effective teaching methods, both from experiences in the college classroom and in the elementary classrooms.

As far as acquisition of instructional resources and materials, prior experiences were helpful but, as noted by one teacher, "We learned what they are, but in each placement we have to find out *where* they are."

Little knowledge of writing standards and benchmarks proved to be a challenge for one of the teachers. Overall remarks regarding student evaluation and determination of student learning levels indicated nothing definite for which needs could be met.

Following discipline concerns, the next highest area of concern was that of dealing with individual student differences, that is, dealing with special needs, abilities, and problems. In regard to their preservice training, opinions were mixed.

> Not enough time was spent on special needs (the basic needs that are mainstreamed) and culture awareness and diversity.
>
> It would be great to receive instruction on how to differentiate within a lesson.

> As of now, I don't have any drastic differences among my students. I feel the classes have prepared me if I do.

One teacher's perception was that, "each situation was always unique."

Expectations of a First Year Teacher

There seemed to be a higher need for an awareness of what is expected contractually of a teacher by the school district. The needs varied from knowing the particulars of a contract, to having knowledge of such things as insurance, retirement planning, and Iowa Public Employees' Retirement System (IPERS).

Expectations by the principal seemed fairly clear because of the first year experience. Comments indicated help was provided on an individual basis, and one teacher's principal "does an excellent job of communicating with me and helping me in all ways possible because I am a first year teacher!"

An awareness of what was expected by other teachers resulted in two types of comments:

> We were not welcomed by the other teachers, partly because of racial reasons, partly because of education. The administration could have done a better job of team building.

> Communication is the key, I believe. Having to work with four teachers, we talk often about expectations of the students and my role as a teacher.

> Some of the issues do need to be addressed by administrators, but some things are just between teachers; that's the part that can be difficult.

Expectations of parents were handled in different ways. As a first year teacher, one respondent commented, "Not being a parent myself, it is difficult to know what they need from me and what I can do to help them." Other comments reflected a proactive strategy to become aware of those expectations.

> Before school started, I had pre-school conferences with the parents. That day we talked about expectations. I keep the lines of communication open.

Overall, the comments reflected specific concerns in each area by individual teachers. No one area seemed dominant in desirability of a high need for assistance. From the open response comments at the conclusion of this survey, indications would point to the fact that the undergraduate experience at their institution prepared the beginning teachers to feel fairly comfortable in their first year of teaching as the following comments asserted:

> My first year has been a great experience and I truly believe that my [college] preparation is the reason for that. I feel like I am miles ahead (in preparation) of other first year teachers I've met . . . colleagues have noted that as well. I cannot say enough good things about my teaching preparation at [my college].

> [My college] well prepared me for my first year teaching experience. I gained the confidence that I needed to know that I could do it. I don't believe that any program could teach you everything you need to know about teaching, for the fact that each experience and situation is unique. The one thing [my college] does have is professors willing to support you and continue teaching you after graduation.

> My first year has been awesome! I work with a wonderful principal and staff, who are very supportive and allow for learning! I have learned more about teaching the past six months than, I think, in my four years of college! Maybe that's because I'm in control of a classroom and there are many things about teaching that cannot be taught in a college classroom. All of my students come from low socioeconomic situations and lack a lot of prior knowledge; therefore, I feel very needed by them just as they need from me. I feel very fortunate to have great people to work with and awesome children!
>
> I think my [college] education and student teaching was adequate. I think, though, that I truly learned how to teach and what it takes to be a teacher this year as a first year teacher. I truly learned how to take on all of the responsibility of my own classroom. With student teaching, you never really feel like the kids or the classroom are really your own.
> You don't develop the relationships with the parents, kids, and other teachers. I wish I could go back and take some of my education classes again because now they mean something because I have a class to relate the information to.

The results of the surveys informed and guided the researcher in conducting the focus group interviews (Krueger, 1994). The two focus groups met on the same day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The responses to the seven focus group questions (Appendix C) seemed to be grouped into three main areas: challenges, support, and advice.

Challenges

The challenges encompassed a broad range of concerns. As the year began, many of the beginning teachers referred to lack of knowledge of the little details needed to start their year.

> At the beginning . . . on the very first day they had a tour for the sixth graders, and kind of show them where their classes would be and everything. I didn't know the building either! Here were these sixth graders . . . "Mr. H., where's this and this and this?" I go, "I don't know." They ask, "Well, how do I get in my locker?" "Well, I don't know." They just expect you to know everything, and I hadn't even been shown that stuff yet. I felt kind of like an idiot when I tried . . . it's just those little things that you don't think about until they actually happen to you. It's the hardest thing I found out.
>
> It's kind of a baptism by fire. They just kind of throw you in, say, "Go get'em" and you really don't know how. They cover a lot of stuff in the inservices, but they don't cover the little intricacies like, you've got to have your attendance done by such and such a time . . . just little things like that.
>
> Detention slips . . . I didn't know where those were. I had to look through my desk. I didn't know how to fill them out, I had to be shown how to do that . . . attendance . . . I didn't have any idea. Those were the things that got me. Obviously we know how to teach and all that stuff. It was all the little things . . . if you didn't know how to do it when you were student teaching the other person would do it. But once you're not student teaching they're not there to do that. It's all you, and if you don't do it, it's all your responsibility.
>
> I think it's the little things . . . I mean they don't tell you how to take attendance, they don't tell you . . . the little things about the school day. Then all of a sudden they come up and you have no idea what to do. No one tells you, they just assume you know.

> You don't know the little things that you don't know you need until the day comes when you need them.

Lack of money and resources emerged as a concern as the school year began, as well as not having knowledge about insurance issues.

> The first couple of weeks there was a situation with insurance. You need to know to talk to somebody about life insurance, annuities. I didn't know anything about those things. There was someone who tried to get me in a plan; fortunately I was able to get out of it when I found out it wasn't a part of the school plan.

Relationships with parents was an area that reflected a variety of challenges. The concerns ranged from conferences and meetings with parents to not having sufficient parental support to interruptions during class from parents wanting to talk about their children.

> I'd say the most challenging thing for me was just to catch up on the vocabulary, especially when parents came for the first time conferences . . . the parents know. They send their kids every day and they want the best for them. If they're not getting the best, then they're not happy. They want ways to help their kids. They obviously care about them. That really caught me. I tried to remember what all those teachers said in class about reading. I had to go back and look some things up and then send a letter . . . that could tell them what they could do at home. I was pretty much caught in my tracks my first conference.

> [Don't argue] with parents, because there have been times when a parent comes in and they're dead set that their kid is perfect and doesn't do anything wrong. If you start arguing with them it's just going to make matters worse.

> I had two parents that did not come for their child's first conference, and I think in kindergarten that's the very beginning. If they are not coming now, what's going to happen through their whole time [in school]. I have called home asking them to come. I have sent notes. I couldn't ever get them to come in and do anything.
>
> I told [the parents] I am one of those positive people who is trying to help kids, but if I'm not getting the support there's not much I can do about it.
>
> There's not a lot of support from home. In first grade and kindergarten you need so much outside support to do the things you need to do.
>
> You have a parent who comes in because their kid's in trouble and you're in the middle of your English lesson, and they're not going to leave until you talk to them. Then what are you going to do?

Although most parent comments dealt with frustrations, two of the teachers commented on the positive ways they had found of communicating with their parents:

> We have homework folders with bedtime book checkouts, and that's how we keep our parent communication. We write notes in there every day and we get pretty good responses from the parents.
>
> I'd say keeping communication open with parents is a big thing, because a lot of times I know you're getting overwhelmed and don't think you have the time to do it. At least once a month or every two weeks encourage them to come in or call or something, but you can't just shut them out of their child's education because they're going to know and they're going to want to come in, so keep that open.

Family concerns were also mentioned as a challenge to the beginning teachers. A parent in trouble with the law who involved the child was one

situation a new teacher had to deal with. Home life and socioeconomic considerations were also a cause for concern.

> I had to deal with a lot of kids that just have terrible home lives, terrible home lives. Just realizing I can't do a thing about it . . . the only time I can is when they're at school, and realizing that was tough.
>
> The one thing I have learned the most about is the different living styles and cultures. A lot of the stuff that we are running into is not taught in classes.
>
> Our school is really poor. We have 65% on free and reduced lunch. I have 21 kids in my class, 15 have split homes.

One teacher expressed concern when faced with a young, single mother.

> For the first few weeks I heard of some of the situations. There's a mom in my class. She's got five kids and she's 24, never been married. I'm just . . . I heard that and thought, "You've got to be kidding! You're telling me this mom's 24 and he's 10?" I'm thinking, "This isn't going to work out." I was doing the math in my head . . . the mom was just 14.

The subject of discipline elicited responses that indicated frustration with what to do with discipline and how it was defined in their schools.

> I was really unsure about the discipline factor of it. I didn't know how strict they wanted the teachers to be. I didn't even know what they meant about discipline. I had to figure it out on my own. That led to more problems I encountered later.
>
> The discipline policy . . . if you're not used to that you don't know what they're doing. They talk to you like you're supposed to know. I'm learning things now that it's almost the end of the year that I should have known.

> Right away I could pick out the kids that I knew I was going to have problems with, but knowing what to do and different actions to take to get them going the right way, that was frustrating.

Others commented on things that went wrong at the beginning of the year with their discipline.

> Discipline was a challenge for me because you start off [wanting] the kids to like you, so you don't want to come across as mean. I know in the beginning I should have been more firm with whatever it was they were doing.
>
> I made a huge mistake by saying, "I know you just came in from summer break and are used to talking whenever you want and getting up whenever you want, so I'll be a little bit more lenient." Still, still paying for that one.
>
> I'm a little inconsistent with my discipline . . . next year I will be a little bit more consistent with the fact that I have to treat everybody equally no matter if they get into trouble.

Other comments reflected on the wisdom of learning from what happened this year in order to establish a better beginning of the year.

> The first week is critical, I found out.
>
> You've got to lay down the law on those first days.
>
> Set the rules the first minute . . . The most important thing I think discipline–wise you have to do is nail them the first minute. I cannot express how much easier that will make your year go by.
>
> I've learned so much in discipline . . . HUGE!

A curricular area that elicited responses was in the area of standards and

benchmarks. Comments ranged from knowing little about writing standards and benchmarks to trying to meet the benchmarks.

> We had three full days of inservice only with standards and benchmarks. That's one thing you don't know anything about and you walk in and they say, "Well, what do you think? Does this align very well with Unit 2 in your book?" and I'm going, "What's Unit 2?"
>
> I teach three periods and we don't have enough materials. We hardly have any science books, and we have benchmarks, and the books don't match the benchmarks.

When addressing the special needs of children, two primary concerns surfaced: the frustration of meeting the needs of all children and the broad range of abilities the teacher must work with.

> You can't get to all of them, you can't reach all of them, you cannot make a difference in all their lives. You just can't do everything. That's the bottom line. You can't do everything and that was hard for me to accept.
>
> The first day I got my stuff out of my mailbox there were three sheets stapled together of just names I have to meet special needs for.
>
> Being in the classrooms other times, this time you know it's your responsibility. Just seeing the wide range of abilities you have...when I've been in classrooms before I've never noticed all the different abilities there are.
>
> A challenge is when I have really low students that I'm trying to work with to get up to a level that most of the students are, but then I feel bad because I don't have enough to work with my students who are above average . . . I feel like I'm leaving them out, that I'm not helping them go any further, but I have too much to do to catch up the other ones. That's always my problem. I haven't figured out yet how to balance my time.

One teacher referred to matters of classroom inclusion.

> My [challenges] were trying to meet the needs of those special needs children, the inclusion. I feel lost. I could see their faces as blank. They didn't understand. Number one, they can't read, you know. It seems to me it's so unfair to them . . . that's challenging.

Working with a non-English speaking student caused concerns for another.

> I have two kids that don't speak any English. I mean, what are you supposed to do? I bought a Spanish dictionary . . . so when the other kids are working on something I'll just sit down and learn some sentences with them and do things like that, that are not related to science or anything, but it's something.

Challenges in relationships with students and with colleagues emerged as an area of concern that had not surfaced in any of the data collected to this point. Out of class situations and relationships with students was an area that presented concerns to several of the teachers. Female student interest in young male teachers and junior high boys sharing personal relationships with junior high girls to the beginning teacher were two situations that the first year teachers were unprepared to deal with. Another situation that was unanticipated was the unwanted attention of a male teacher to a new single female teacher.

Other challenges in the area of relationships that surfaced dealt with the issue of loneliness for the first year teacher.

> There are the challenges of meeting people; it is very frustrating. Most of the other teachers are married with kids. I am the youngest of the faculty,

the next teacher is 30 years old. There just isn't much to do. I am happy with the school district, but not happy with the town. Are any of the others experiencing this?

It is a bigger school than I am used to. I miss the closeness of a small town atmosphere.

It was a totally different experience than just moving away from family and friends coming to college. Everyone might think, "Oh, I've gone through college. I can make it away." Yet, when you're on your own, that's an added stress, starting something new.

I think it's just a big adjustment. [You're] coming away from college, you're away from family and friends.

For me it was moving out there and not knowing anybody and not having anyone to go to after school. I went home to my apartment and sat there and did schoolwork and went to bed and did it all over the next day. I did that for a good first amount of my time out there. Just in the last couple of months it's probably changed, and it's better and easier to have people like the support system outside of the school.

I would like to know more about the community, get something that I could do outside of school because I'm not involved in [anything] outside of school where I could meet other people.

A positive challenge that was unexpected for the beginning teachers was their influence on their students as a role model.

Our school is predominately 85% Black, and we have maybe four Black teachers in the whole building with 500 and some students, so you meet a need, you really do. They know that when I talk I'm serious.

I got an e-mail this weekend from one of my kids. I almost cried when I read it, because her mom teaches and I got an e-mail from her saying that she just wanted to say thanks for doing an awesome job this year. She

said [her daughter] told [her] last night that "she loves you as much as she loves me." It made me feel really good.

I just love walking in there. I just love those children, I don't care how terrible they are. I just love to see their faces. You know it's like, "Wow! Another opportunity!"

It's neat seeing the kind of effect you have on the kids. I am the youngest teacher in the school. Just walking down the hall, you relate with the kids in a different way than a teacher that has been there 30 years because you know more about what they're interested in, like the music they're interested in, and just everything they're interested in. Just being able to relate with the students . . . to have some effect on their lives, a positive effect of their life . . .

I'm only one of three males in the building, and one is the principal, so it's me and another guy that are teachers. I just feel that's what they need.

You get to know them a lot better and that carries over into the classroom. They think you have something invested in them, and you can relate to them better.

There's a lot of kids that don't have dads that you run into. You find that they latch onto you [a male teacher] a little quicker.

Just to know that maybe of all the kids there you can get through one or two someday if it's where his or her path might not have been straight...

It's nice to be able to feel like I'm needed there and that I have a purpose there. It's not just to be there.

Support

Means of support seemed to be both positive and negative in the beginning teachers' experiences. Positive supports came from individuals within and outside of the school setting, as well as through collaboration and teamwork within the school building. Some positive support came from co-teachers or other members of the teaching staff.

> There's a teacher I work with, she's been there for me . . . she helps me out with the little things. Like she's got all these books. I'm just starting out and don't have these. She [told me], "You need to use these, and this," and that helped so much.
>
> I asked for lots of help from my colleagues . . . there were no other first year teachers in my building to vent and work with . . .
>
> Another third grade teacher, the next youngest teacher, has helped me the most. Our personalities match. I can ask questions and we share ideas.
>
> [There are] five kindergarten teachers in our building . . . They are just really great to work with . . . and have been a big help. They have helped me with the units and different ideas and having materials that I can get from them and get ideas from.
>
> There are three kindergartens in my building and I get along with [those teachers] really well. They would help me out in any way that I need.

Working with a teaching team provided another means of support.

> I think I'm pretty lucky. We have a team of sixth grade teachers, and we meet once a week to figure out what problems we're having with certain students or try to figure out how to tie each others' subject area

> together. They've supported me. I've found out the best support . . . they'll go, "Just wait until after the first year. It will get better." They don't come down on me because I do make mistakes. They say, "We've all been there. I remember when I was a first year teacher." They'll tell me stories and stuff like that. It makes me feel a lot better because they do realize they were a first year teacher once, and that you do make mistakes. And I've made a lot of them. I just find myself being very lucky.
>
> My teaching partners are wonderful, and I have learned the value of cooperation and of team planning.
>
> . . . Working with the other teachers and the support staff, getting ideas from them or suggestions from them on things to do . . . I think that's been neat.

Some of the beginning teachers were assigned mentors from whom they found the support they needed.

> In [my school] they have a mentor program where each first year teacher gets a mentor or homeroom teacher that teaches the same area or grade. Mine, luckily, oh I've been really lucky . . . was the Teacher of the Year one year. He is the other sixth grade science teacher, and he's just been great. The first week we had school he invited me over to his house for lunch and things like that.
>
> I was assigned to another kindergarten teacher as my mentor. We would sit down and if I have any questions I can go to her . . . I've gone to her with a lot of things and problems I've had or just concerns or anything, and she's just always willing to answer anything anytime during the day or help me out in anyway possible.
>
> I have a wonderful mentor. I think that it's essential for a first year teacher to have a good mentor program because I would die without [mine].
>
> They paired me up with a first grade teacher, but I don't think I've been affected by not having the same grade level, because I can go to her with

> policies and procedures, and what to do when this happens, or even just class readiness . . . it's a good partnership. She'll just come in and see how it's going or if I need anything, or just to talk.
>
> You're assigned a mentor, so I knew even before I went in who my mentor teacher was. We just have to go to a meeting that's not even necessarily about your relationship with your mentor. It's just more the overall picture of school improvement and what you can do together. I know for two years you have to go to the meetings, but after that she would still be willing. I could still go to her with everything.
>
> My mentor . . . was really helpful in setting up my classroom and going through different things. She pops her head in, she's right next to me, and [asks me if I] need anything, if I understand what to do in an early dismissal or snow dismissal, what policies [I] need to make sure are covered on an emergency like that. Different things like that are really good to know. If you're not assigned one in your district then I think you can make it your job, your priority, to find somebody and ask them to be your mentor.

For some of the teachers, their principals were a positive means of support.

> My principal is part of the reason why I don't want to change schools. I like him as an administrator, he's very visible in a classroom and in the school, and is always giving compliments. I can go to him and ask him what to do with a child, and he'll know exactly who they are and what they are doing or what struggles I have. He knows the students and can give me suggestions on that. Just very, very positive and very helpful.
>
> The principal is unbelievable and will answer all my questions.
>
> [My principal] is constantly praising me or telling me what a good job I'm doing or asking if I need anything.

Some of the teachers, however, related their administrative support as a negative experience.

> We don't get a lot of support . . . That's one thing that really bugs me is this kind of lack of leadership . . . you just feel better having those people there with you.

> The feeling I get from our principal is he will back the parents almost before he will back the teachers. That's why I'm kind of reluctant to have him at a meeting and things like that, because he almost seems like he would believe the parent's side before he would back the teacher.

Beyond the school setting itself several of the teachers found their support from college experiences and professors.

> My instructors from [college] . . . like in science . . . she was there. She knows her stuff and she was willing to help [me] and take that extra step. Because we didn't have materials she helped me search the building until we found some . . . I think she helped a lot. She listened, you know, I could call her, and she would say, "Look, this is your first year. Take it easy, don't try everything at one time. Don't be a superstar."

> I really got good experience at [college]. I feel like that helped me a lot when I was a first year teacher. I mean, there's still a lot of stuff that you can't know, but we were in the classroom a lot and I had gotten a lot of ideas, and I saved everything from every experience that I had.

A positive support system for one of the teachers was the support received outside of the classroom.

> It's good as a first year teacher that I get support from the system outside of the classroom. I think part of my survival has been that I have a wonderful support system outside because I really needed a lot of emotional support. It's really hard for me and it's gotten a lot better, but I would come home at the end of the day in the beginning . . . you need to have people who will listen to you that care about the things that happen in your classroom because you're so consumed.

While many of the support systems relayed were positive, some of the actions of other teachers were portrayed as negative influences.

> There are a lot of teachers who have been in that school for 25 to 30 years, and they have forgotten what it's like to be a first year teacher and are just kind of set in their own paths about what they think education is. I think they just forget that they used to be there at one time. You find out who wants to help you once the school year gets going, or who would rather sit down in the lounge. It's kind of an eye-opening experience from that point, I think.

> Working with negative co-workers in the other classrooms is challenging. The other teachers don't like the changes that are being made, so they complain all of the time and they also talk badly about the director. That was hard to learn to walk away from the gossip and try not to be a part of it.

> I was just thinking about something serious about the teacher atmosphere there. The teachers have their own little cliques or whatever. They must have been fighting with each other for years on some issue. You try and stay out of it. I've tried to stay out of the lunchroom. I try to stay out of that stuff and stay in the classroom.

> I hate . . . to eat in the lounge . . . everybody's badmouthing everybody. They get all hung up, you know . . . so I quit, I did that the first week. I go around and eat lunch with different groups of seventh graders every day.

> I see these teachers who have been teaching for 25 to 30 years, and they're just so cranky and whiny about everything. I'll teach 15 to 20 years and then go do something else, because I don't want to turn out like that. We had a group of [young] people come in to talk to the kids . . . The next day three of these teachers were just whining about it the whole day. It just kind of ruins it for you.

A positive support for one of the beginning teachers was found in her experience with the secretaries.

> I love my two secretaries. They will do anything, not just necessarily in school, but in the community. When I went down for my interview, one of the secretaries was there. After I found out I got the job and was back down there looking at things, she was calling realtors for me and giving me numbers and addresses of places to go. [When we] get forms, they'll sit right down with me and help me fill them out. My principal is the same way, but I really, really rely on my secretaries. They helped a lot.

Advice

Some of the responses concerning advice the teacher participants would give to new beginning teachers were embedded in responses about their discipline challenges of being a new teacher. Advice that emerged as separate findings included:

> Once you get your job, start planning what you can, but don't get overwhelmed. Don't think that you are the super teacher, and you can do everything that first year. You're going to get frustrated. Trying too much is just not going to be worth it.
>
> You need to have a real good idea of what your district expects.
>
> Getting involved, like on a committee, helps.
>
> I had somebody tell me that as a first year teacher, besides running away, you should try to get out of there by 5:30, because first year teachers can spend a lot of time in their classroom after school. You will burnout. You'll start to eat, sleep, drink everything school and suddenly . . .

> I think I'll say a problem I have with a lot of the older teachers is they've been doing it so long they don't know how to have fun anymore. Just like it's a hassle to come in every day . . . they get so stressed out about certain petty things. Just have fun with it, don't get so swamped by everything that it becomes stressful. It's your job. Just have fun with it.
>
> Be professional the whole time you're around kids. You have eyes on you the whole day long. No matter what you're doing. It might not be the kids in your class, it might be the second graders down the hall. There's always eyes watching you to see what you're going to do next, how you're going to react, what you're going to say. So be careful what you say and how you say it, because everything is taken in by those kids and is taken home.

One of the teachers summed up the session with the following advice:

> Don't sweat the small stuff. Let the small stuff roll off your back, leave it at work. Don't take it all with you.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine what concerns beginning teachers experienced after graduating from a small liberal arts college. It also sought to identify what means of support those beginning teachers had available to them in their first year of teaching. Because beginning teachers' problems that were identified in previous studies seemed to point to little change in the current needs of novice teachers, a better understanding was sought to make a connection between the needs of beginning teachers and the support systems offered to them.

The study was guided by the following questions which provided the conceptual framework for analyzing the data:

1. What challenges do first year teachers face?
2. What ways do first year teachers cope?
3. What are first year teachers' best means of support?

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

Using the research questions as a framework from which to summarize and discuss the findings, the first question, "What challenges do first year

teachers face?" elicited responses that basically fell into three areas: communication skills, teaching behaviors, and expectations.

Challenges first year teachers faced seemed consistent with previous research findings, most notably the results of Veenman's (1984) study. According to the survey responses, beginning teachers indicated they had a low to moderate need for assistance in the areas of communication skills, teaching behaviors, and expectations, the three major categories within which the survey items were grouped. Although there was not a high need for assistance indicated in any one area, teachers in this study cited classroom discipline, communication with parents, and special needs of students as slightly higher areas where they felt they could have used more assistance. For the most part, however, beginning teachers participating in this survey indicated that a solid background in their undergraduate training enabled them to feel well prepared in the areas surveyed.

The results of the survey were consistent with the findings from the focus group interviews. The challenge of discipline that resulted from those discussions elaborated on the participants' frustrations over what to do when dealing with discipline and their lack of knowledge about the school's expectations regarding student discipline. The beginning teachers also

recognized the need for establishing classroom discipline at the onset of the school year, as evidenced by their examples of what they had learned and would change for the coming year.

Communication skills, specifically those with parents, was also an area in which the teachers in the focus groups shared concerns. Talking with and enlisting the support of parents at conferences generated teacher concern. While not all experiences were negative, the concerns raised were consistent with the survey findings that showed a need for further assistance in this area.

The third highest area of challenge mentioned in the surveys was in the teachers' abilities to meet the special needs of students. The focus group interviews concurred that this area was a challenge in two primary ways: meeting the needs of all children within the classroom setting, and the broad range of student academic abilities with which a teacher must work. Dealing with matters of inclusion and non-English speaking students were among the concerns the beginning teachers faced.

A new area that emerged in the focus groups but not on the survey was the significant challenge beginning teachers felt about the expectations of them as the school year began. These ranged from contractual details to preparation

and organization. What seemed to be especially frustrating were the "little details" and the assumption that the beginning teachers had knowledge of these.

Relationships with others surfaced as a completely new category of concern in the focus groups. While the relationships among colleagues and students seemed fairly typical of interactions among teachers in general, the statements about loneliness of being a new single teacher in a new community emerged unsolicited and without probing. Those comments paralleled thoughts found in literature (Ryan et al., 1980; Veenman, 1984) which referred to the emotional and social isolation of a beginning teacher in a new teaching position.

An area of challenge for beginning teachers that emerged in both the surveys and the focus groups was in the curricular area of dealing with standards and benchmarks. The beginning teachers' lack of knowledge of how to work with standards and benchmarks presented some frustrations in what was assumed to be prior understanding on their part.

New problems that emerged in this study that were not present in previous studies seemed to parallel current educational trends, specifically in the areas of inclusion of special needs students into the classroom and working with standards and benchmarks.

The remaining responses to the research questions indicated that the beginning teachers' best means of support included ways of coping discerned from the teachers' comments. "What are first year teachers' best means of support?" provided insights into both positive and negative influences on the beginning teachers as they sought ways to cope with their first year experience.

Discussion during the focus group interviews provided the most telling results to this question as the participants revealed both the most helpful aspects of support systems and negative impressions from some in supporting roles. Teaching colleagues offered the most consistent means of support to beginning teachers. Some of these teachers were assigned as mentors, while others went out of their way to welcome the beginning teachers with positive encouragement, advice, and materials. Collaboration and teamwork with colleagues assisted the first year teachers in feeling like a viable part of their teaching team. Most of the administrators of the new teachers anticipated and provided the much-needed first year support, as well. College experiences and support of professors for first year teachers was also a source of support that emerged from both the surveys and from the focus groups.

While most support systems were positive, the negative sources that stemmed from within the school were recognized as such, and methods to

counteract those situations were used. The beginning teachers chose alternate sites or activities to prevent being drawn into those negative settings.

As noted by Bainer (in Ganser et al., 1998), support for the beginning teacher can be found from a variety of levels and from a variety of sources. Regardless of the source, support for the first year teacher can result in success and effectiveness of the beginning teacher (Kajs et al., 1999).

The findings of this research indicate the same basic problems that existed for beginning teachers cited in earlier studies (Johnston & Ryan, 1980) still exist for beginning teachers today. If one were to assume that the problems are part of the process of "beginning to teach" and are a part of a developmental process beginning teachers undergo (Baptiste & Sheerer, 1997; Berliner, 1986; Fuller, 1970; Katz, 1999), a key to an effective beginning teaching experience would seem to be how the beginning teachers can be supported when faced with these problems.

Summary

The results of this study indicate that beginning teachers do encounter challenges in their first year of teaching. The most common types of challenges center on communication skills, teaching behaviors, and expectations. Specific support systems exist for many of the beginning teachers that include principals,

mentors, other teachers, and teacher educators from colleges and universities. The assistance offered from these support systems affects the ease of a beginning teacher's transition into the profession. The needs of beginning teachers are especially evident at the beginning of the school year and are consistent with the developmental stages of beginning teachers. The findings have implications for further research which are discussed in the recommendations.

Conclusions

As a result of this study, an opportunity exists for those of us in higher education to listen to the voices of beginning teachers. It is important to consider what beginning teachers are telling us about challenges that face them in their first year of teaching. It is especially critical to develop supportive programs that meet these challenges in order to prevent the attrition of beginning teachers from the profession. This is especially crucial in light of the teacher shortages facing schools in the future.

There is, however, a need to provide consistency in programs across the state. It is important that programs recognize the developmental stages of beginning teachers in order to create programs that speak to those needs in their progressive stages. Programs need to begin with preservice teachers since the

first stage often begins with the student teaching experience. However, it must extend beyond graduation and into the first year of teaching.

According to the study conducted by the Ohio State University and the Columbus Public Schools, further investigation is recommended for collaborative research that would benefit both university faculty who help prepare teachers and the schools that will be receiving the teachers (Stroot et al., 1999). It is imperative that colleges and universities work collaboratively as programs are developed to continue a beginning teacher's professional development.

A consistent program instituted across Iowa would ensure that all first year teachers would have access to the same opportunities to develop and expand their teaching skills. Utilizing the services of the Iowa Association of Colleges of Teacher Educators and the Area Education Agencies would not only provide the potential for expertise in collaboration between the colleges and the schools, the Area Education Agencies would also have the opportunity to establish a geographic cohort of beginning teachers. This cohort would have the ability to create a support system among peers experiencing the same phenomenon.

Since the Iowa State Legislature has set a goal to ensure the success of beginning teachers through teacher induction programs, an intentional and consistent plan that is available to all beginning teachers will have the opportunity

to "promote excellence in teaching, build a supportive environment within school districts, increase the retention of promising beginning teachers, and promote the personal and professional well-being of teachers" (Iowa State Legislature, 1999).

Recommendations

The identification of specific needs and support systems available to beginning teachers allows educators to examine intentional and consistent efforts that would be helpful in meeting those needs. Supported by my findings and others' reflection, research, and study, I would make the following recommendations.

1. A longitudinal study should be conducted to examine experiences of future teacher education graduates from this institution to determine if the same needs and problems exist for those beginning teachers. The study should also be extended to include all K-12 beginning teachers from the institution. An examination of needs beyond a single year would determine if there are patterns in the needs. Identified patterns would allow the college to study ways it might offer support in those areas to beginning teachers who have graduated from the institution, either prior to graduation or as they assume their first teaching positions.

2. A broader study which would include teacher education graduates from all Iowa colleges and universities would enable educators to identify patterns of need that were consistent among all beginning teachers, regardless of institutional background. Information from a study of this nature would allow college educators to examine their role in the stages of a teacher's development, beginning with preservice experiences, which would include student teaching.

3. A case study of the experience of one beginning teacher would allow a deeper understanding in the areas of beginning of the year expectations and emotional support that were indicated in this study. An in-depth case study would also enable the researcher to note the specific developmental process the beginning teacher experiences. This knowledge would help the college or university prepare teacher education students to meet this need.

4. As a way to provide consistency in the methods of support, it would seem logical to combine the resources of the schools with the colleges and universities from which teachers are graduating (Bullough, 1990). A needs assessment survey and study should be conducted to explore ways the two institutions could work together to provide a "seamless transition" for beginning teachers.

5. A recommendation for the Iowa Association of Colleges of Teacher Educators and the fifteen Iowa Area Education Agencies to combine resources would result in the development of a strong program that could meet the needs of beginning teachers. The combined expertise would allow beginning teachers to be served consistently throughout the state. Access to locations that are geographically accommodating would enable participation of beginning teachers and the development of cohort groups that would provide additional support.

6. Colleges and universities need to explore ways of implementing support systems that take their teacher education graduates' comments and provide support in those areas that are specific to the needs of that particular college's teacher education graduates. Options might include support for mentors and support teams, training programs for staff development, and evaluations of beginning teachers (Furtwengler, 1995). As suggested by the participants in this study, implementation of a support system through their graduating college that would include addresses and grade levels of graduating colleagues who are also in their first year of teaching would provide them access to others experiencing the same phenomenon. This would allow cohorts of beginning teachers to engage in a networking system (Merseth, 1991). Meeting by grade levels prior to the beginning of the school year at the college with

veteran teachers was an additional suggestion from a beginning teacher. This would create a support system, as well as a better understanding of the expectations that exist at the beginning of the school year.

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APPENDIX A
Participant Consent Form

January 14, 2000

Dear Teachers,

Currently I am working on my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership with an emphasis in Curriculum and Teaching from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. For my dissertation I am planning to conduct a study that will look at first-year teachers who have graduated from Wartburg and their first-year teaching experiences.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the feelings and experiences you have undergone in your first year as teachers. Data for my research will be collected through the survey you are receiving in this mailing. I will also be conducting random interviews, gathering documentation, and taking field notes.

Your responses will provide valuable insights to my study. I encourage you to be open and honest and to freely share your experiences. In order to use this information in my dissertation, and in the event this information might be included in an article submitted for publication, I need to request your consent to participate in this study. If you feel you need to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time.

Thank you very much for your consideration. Please clip the consent form found at the bottom of this page and return it in the provided envelope by February 1, 2000. I appreciate your cooperation and participation in this study.

Enjoy the second half of your school year!

Sincerely,

Kathy Book

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose for the use of information received in these surveys. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the findings after the research is completed, please indicate below.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

_____ Yes, I would like a copy of the research findings.

_____ No, I would not like a copy of the research findings.

APPENDIX B

First Year Elementary Teachers: A Survey

FIRST YEAR ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

A Survey

PLEASE READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING THIS SURVEY.

In an effort to improve preparation of first year teachers, this questionnaire is designed to assess the perceptions of first year teachers.

Please identify your ongoing perceived level of need in the areas listed below. For example, as you began your teaching, if you needed no further assistance in developing strategies for motivating students, mark "low need."

Low need would indicate that you *felt comfortable* in that area and needed *no further assistance* in meeting this need.
Moderate need would indicate that you felt you were able to *adequately meet needs* in this area, but would be *interested in receiving assistance* in order to more capably meet this need.
High need would indicate that you felt this was an area in which you *could have used some assistance*, either in preparation, materials, or support. You would be interested in receiving assistance in order to more capably meet this need.

Space is available below each item if you wish to provide additional comments.

Thank you for taking part in this study.

1. Written and spoken communication skills
   ☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

2. Communication with parents
   ☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

3. Communication with teaching colleagues
   ☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

4. Communication with administrators
   ☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

5. Personal motivation (look forward to coming to school each day)

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

6. Motivation of students

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

7. Classroom discipline

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

8. Organization of daily lesson design

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

9. Organization of long term instructional planning

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

10. Organization and management of time and work on a daily basis

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

11. Knowledge of subject matter

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

12. Knowledge and use of effective teaching methods

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

13. Acquisition of instructional resources and materials

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

14. Student evaluation (assessing student work)

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

15. Ability to determine the learning level of students

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

16. Individual student differences (dealing with special needs, abilities, and problems)

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

17. Awareness of what is expected of me contractually by the school district

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

18. Awareness of what is expected of me by the principal

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

19. Awareness of what is expected of me by other teachers

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

20. Awareness of what is expected of me by parents

☐ Low need ☐ Moderate Need ☐ High Need

Teacher Demographic Information

Name (Optional)_____Age_____Sex_____

Location of school(s)_____

Number of students in your district _____

Grade level(s) you are currently teaching_____

Number of students in your class_____
(List multiple class sections as applicable)

Please state any additional comments you might have below.

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

Please return by February 1, 2000 to:

Kathy Book
504 10th Ave. NW
Waverly, Iowa 50677

APPENDIX C
Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Tell me about your first year of teaching.

2. Tell me about the beginning of your year.

3. Tell me the best thing about the year.

4. What was the most challenging thing?

5. Who and what helped you the most?

6. What things would you do differently?

7. What advice would you give to this year's Wartburg graduates?

APPENDIX D
Survey Postcard Reminder

Dear Teachers,

Last week you should have received a survey questionnaire which was directed towards first year elementary teachers who have graduated from Wartburg this past year. This is an important study that will provide insights into first-year teaching experiences, which is the topic of my dissertation.

To date I have not received your response. It is important that I am able to include your opinions in my study. If you have already responded, thank you for your help and excuse this card. If you have not responded, won't you please take a minute now to do so? If you require additional information, please call me at 1-800-772-2085, extension 8316. Again, thank you!

Kathy Book
504 10th Ave. NW
Waverly, IA 50677

January 26, 2000

APPENDIX E
Focus Group Informational Letter

February 14, 2000

Dear ,

Thank you for accepting my invitation to attend a discussion of beginning teachers on Saturday, February 19th. This meeting will be held in Room 102 Old Main on the Wartburg College campus. Your discussion group will be meeting at 10:00 a.m. I would like you to be my guest for lunch and would also like to offer you a complimentary ticket to the Wartburg-Loras home basketball game that evening.

Since I will be talking to a limited number of people, the success and quality of our discussion is based on the cooperation of the people who attend. Because you have accepted my invitation, your attendance at the session is anticipated and will aid in making my research of beginning teachers a success.

If for some reason you find you are not able to attend, please call to let me know as soon as possible. My phone number is 319-352-4364.

I look forward to seeing you on February 19.

Sincerely,

Kathy Book